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# Conservative Public History in Russia

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**Abstract:** Conservative public history in Russia merges state propaganda with contemporary tools of public engagement. It emphasizes themes such as patriotism, military triumphs, and state-centered historical narratives, while restricting opportunities for critical reflection on controversial episodes of the Russian past – such as framing World War II as the Great Patriotic War, Stalinist repression, and the transformations of the 1990s. Key actors include state-supported organizations like the Russian Historical Society and the Russian Military Historical Society, alongside memorial projects, historical parks, and educational initiatives. Bloggers and media outlets also play a prominent role in shaping and disseminating these narratives. This article explores the main features of these practices and actors through the lens of "conservative public history." Central to this approach are conceptions of a hierarchical structure of historical knowledge and specific constructions of expertise, which are closely tied to political ideas about the state's pivotal role and the limits of the public sphere. The article also examines how conservative public history appropriates new media and contemporary methods of public engagement to advance its agenda.

**Keywords:** conservative public history; Russia; state sponsored history; education; media

In Russia, practices that can be described as forms of public history *avant des lettres* existed in the late Soviet period – especially during perestroika – and throughout the 1990–2000s. These included press debates, appearances by historians and public intellectuals on television (a genre called "conversation with a historian"), historical magazines,[1] the work of civic movements focused on addressing difficult pasts (in particular the Memorial Society), as well as volunteer and local heritage initiatives (ranging from urban history clubs to the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments, VOOPIK[2]). Many of these discussions were highly politicized, frequently framed as confrontations between liberal actors and conservative or right-wing forces: various religious, nationalist, and monarchist groups, such as the Pamyat Society.[3] Yet this kind of public engagement was regarded by many professional historians more like a hobby than a legitimate form of scholarship.[4]

The concept of *public history* formally entered Russian academic discourse in 2012,[5] with the launch of a new master's program in Moscow. Drawing on British and European models, the program sought to connect liberal, Western-oriented intellectuals with urban audiences in Russia's largest cities, creating new platforms for public engagement with the past. Developed in partnership with the University of Manchester, the initiative was inevitably shaped by a Western – and above all European – academic orientation. According to its founders, Andrei Zorin and Vera Dubina,[6] the program's primary aim was to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of history, while also addressing broader theoretical and methodological debates within the discipline. Public history was framed broadly, encompassing both interactions between professional historians and wider audiences, and the active involvement of the public in working with the past. Yet from the outset the program had a distinctly metropolitan and elitist character. It remained concentrated on Moscow and St. Petersburg, largely overlooking Russia's regions and the experiences of diverse

1 Elena Racheva and Boris Stepanov, "Zhurnalistika," in *Vsje v proshlom: Teoriya i praktika publichnoy istorii*, eds. Andrei Zavadski and Vera Dubina (Moscow: Novoye izdatel'stvo, 2021), 99–111.

2 Pjotr Neplyuyev, "Publichnaya istoriya 'po-sovetski'. Regional'nyye otdeleniya vserossiyskogo obshchestva okhrany pamyatnikov istorii i kul'tury: 'byurokraticheskiye pravila igry' i istoriko-kul'turnyy aktivizm," *Perm University Herald. History* 58, no. 3 (2022): 79–93.

3 Nikolay Mitrokhin, *Die russische Partei: Die Bewegung der russischen Nationalisten* (Hannover: Ibidem Verlag, 2014).

4 Irina Savelieva, "Professional'nyye istoriki v 'publichnoy' istorii," Novaya i noveyshaya istoriya 3 (2014): 141–55.

5 Alexander Khodnev, "Public History in Russia: What Is It?" *Public History Weekly* 6, no. 2 (2018), dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2018-11011.

6 Andrei Zavadski, "'My vsegda nakhodimsya v zone interpretatsii istoricheskogo fakta': Andrey Zorin o publichnoy istori," *Laboratoriya publichnoy istori*, September 2, 2013, http://publichistorylab.ru/archives/113; Andrei Zavadski and Vera Dubina, "Vvedenie," in *Vsje v proshlom*, 12; Artem Kravchenko, "The Experience of the First Russian Public History Program," *Public History Weekly* 9 (2021), dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2021-19142.

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**Aleksandr Rusanov,** Department of History, Bielefeld University, Universitätsstraße 25, Bielefeld, Bielefeld, NRW, 33615, Germany

social groups.[7] Despite its liberal orientation, it reproduced existing hierarchies in intellectual life. Nevertheless, it played an important role in foregrounding questions about the public sphere, audiences, and forms of public participation in historical discourse, issues that were deeply political and developed largely in response to the increasingly explicit state control of history during the 2000s.

A decisive transformation unfolded in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of Russian aggression in Ukraine. From this point onward, state control over historical knowledge intensified dramatically. Grassroots initiatives related to history – most visibly the Immortal Regiment movement[8] – as well as civic organizations engaged with heritage, such as VOOPIK, were gradually appropriated and reframed within official narratives. Crucially, the state did not limit itself to harnessing right-wing and conservative tropes, such as the idea of a "thousand-year Russia," imbued with a messianic undertone and popularized by Vladimir Putin as a continuation of late Soviet nationalist rhetoric.[9] It also strategically absorbed liberal discourses and practices, including those linked to public history, reconfiguring them to serve the goals of centralized memory politics.

While considerable research has examined Russia's historical politics (which unhesitatingly conforms to policy),[10] we propose that the concept of *conservative public history* (CPH) is a useful analytical tool for capturing key transformations in this field. As a working concept, CPH enables us to explore tensions between conservatism and populism, while also interrogating the ambiguous space between the public and non-public spheres. In Western contexts, this distinction is typically framed within notions of publicity and privacy; in the Russian case, however, it is shaped by illiberal politics[11] that is becoming increasingly authoritarian, where access to and control over publicness is tightly regulated. Current global debates on the rightward shift in politics often emphasize populist appropriations of the past. In the Russian context, however, as Andrey Oleynikov has persuasively argued,[12] it is more accurate to speak of a *conservative turn*. In this context, the very concept of *conservatism* becomes problematic, as it does not accurately reflect Russia's political reality. Elements of classical conservatism and nationalism may be invoked or imitated, but they operate within economic, social, and political mechanisms of power reproduction and retention that differ fundamentally from those in the West. At the same time, the Russian authorities actively present conservatism as a core component of the country's historical tradition and its contemporary political identity. This turn is marked by intensified centralization and the direct management of history and memory by the state, exercised through officially sanctioned institutions and state-aligned public organizations.[13] The state's active role in moderating historical discourse restricts open debate and critical engagement, reproducing broader patterns of political opacity and non-transparency that characterizes Russia's governance.

The concept of CPH allows us to understand the illiberal[14] appropriation of public history tools as a mechanism for the centralization of historical knowledge. These tools – originally developed to democratize engagement with the past – include the popularization of history through television, podcasts, public lectures, and various forms of outreach to different audiences. In the Russian context, however, such tools are increasingly employed to promote a state-centered historical narrative focused on grand victories, prominent historical figures, and national achievements. This results in a one-dimensional and non-

7 Soon afterward, similar initiatives appeared in Russia's regions – Yaroslavl, Kazan, Perm, and Kaliningrad. One of their most notable contributions was the emphasis on local and regional history. However, these programs concentrated primarily on methods of teaching history (especially in schools) and the integration of digital technologies into pedagogical practice, while also addressing the interaction between historians, regional media, and wider publics.

8 Ivan Kurilla, "Understanding the Immortal Regiment: Memory Dualism in a Social Movement," *Europe-Asia Studies* 75, no. 8 (2023): 1266–85.

9 Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

10 Olga Malinova, *Aktual'noye proshloye: simvolicheskaya politika vlastvuyushchey elity i dilemmy rossiyskoy identichnosti* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015); Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ivan Kurilla, "History as a Political Language," in *Education and the Politics of Memory in Russia and Eastern Europe Infested with History*, ed. Sergey Rumyantsev (London: Routledge, 2025), 209–24.

11 On the discussion of term "illiberal" in Russian and other contexts, see: Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (2022): 303–27.

12 Andrey Oleynikov, "Populism, Presentism, and the Prospects of Critical Historical Thinking in Russia," in *Claiming the People's Past*, 192–208.

13 Serguei Oushakine, "Remembering in Public: On the Affective Management of History," Ab Imperio 1 (2013): 269–302; Jade McGlynn, *Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

14 Following Andrea Pető in debates of illiberal memory, we observe strong parallels with what she identifies as the "nationalization of a hitherto transnational narrative, […] competing victimhood, the creation of new terminology, doublespeak, and anti-intellectualism." Andrea Pető, "The Illiberal Memory Politics in Hungary," *Journal of Genocide Research* 24, no. 2 (2021): 241–49, 241 also provide full page range of article.

conflictual version of history, where public discussion and critical reflection are strictly limited.

This "conservative" model of historical knowledge also presupposes a hierarchical structure that privileges expertise. Yet the very notion of expertise here is defined not through academic debate, but through appeals to an "objective" and authoritative history, legitimized by service to the state. Such a framework excludes genuine communication with scholarly communities and broader publics, mirroring a wider rejection of political contestation. Moreover, it fuses together mutually contradictory elements – romantic nationalist historiography, positivism, Soviet historical materialism, and the civilizational approach – into a loosely integrated but ideologically charged narrative.

At the same time, these practices reflect the perspectives and needs of elite social groups who are largely unfamiliar with, or resistant to, practices of public engagement. Among them are government officials, *siloviki* (military elites), law enforcement agencies, and the Russian Orthodox Church.[15] While far from monolithic, these actors share a marked tendency to avoid publicness and to operate instead through hierarchical structures of authority. Prominent political figures – such as Vladimir Putin, Vladimir Medinsky, and Sergey Naryshkin – have presented themselves as authoritative voices on historical matters, further reinforcing the state's central role in regulating historical discourse. Yet the system does not rely exclusively on Putin or other "strong leaders." Rather, it is embedded in a broader institutional framework. It is crucial to emphasize the wider ramifications of this arrangement. "Conservative" transformations have been especially pronounced over the past decade, accelerating significantly following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.[16] The post-2022 landscape reveals not only the consolidation of CPH, but also its deployment as a tool of wartime legitimization and ideological mobilization.[17]

# 1 Key Historical Themes in Russia Through the Lens of CPH

In Russia, several key "battlefields" of CPH have emerged, where multiple "layers" of historical discourse and policy intersect. These thematic fields reveal how the tools of public history are appropriated to reinforce conservative state-centered narratives, legitimize authority, and control public engagement.

## 1.1 World War II

Since perestroika, the Second World War (the Great Patriotic War in Russian historiography) has been the subject of public debate. Under Vladimir Putin, official memory politics have increasingly centered on the victory in this war, which has become a cornerstone of state propaganda.[18] The narrative now leans heavily on conservative and populist themes, portraying the war as a story of triumph and patriotism. This portrayal is bolstered by state-sponsored films that resemble superhero blockbusters, eschewing complex or uncomfortable topics.[19] Victory is attributed to the wisdom of the leadership,[20] while the war itself is framed as a story of patriotic triumph,[21]one that discourages critical discussion and is protected by law. So, in December 2022, a law criminalizing the desecration of the St. George ribbon – a symbol of wartime memory and military glory – was introduced.[22] The imagery of wartime enemies is often invoked in political rhetoric to describe opponents; the "fascist threat" has been reframed to target the United States and the West, with the Soviet Union depicted as "Europe's savior."[23]

**15** Zuzanna Bogumił et al., "Sacred or Secular? 'Memorial', the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Contested Commemoration of Soviet Repressions," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no 9 (2015): 1416–44.

**16** "Meeting with historians and representatives of Russia's traditional religions," Kremlin, November 4, 2022, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69781.

**17** Konstantin Pakhaliuk, "Smazat' istoriej. Rossijskaja vojna protiv Ukrainy i sistema propagandy," *Istoricheskaja ekspertiza* 3 (2024): 306–27.

**18** Boris Noordenbos, "Memory wars beyond the metaphor: Reflections on Russia's mnemonic propaganda," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 6 (2022): 1299–1302.

**19** Egor Isaev, "The Militarization of the Past in Russian Popular Historical Films," in *Ideology After Union: Political Doctrines, Discourses, and Debates in Post-Soviet Societies*, eds. Alexander Etkind and Mikhail Minakov (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2020), 237–50.

**20** Koposov, *Memory Laws*, 247–8.

**21** Petr Kratochvíl and Gaziza Shakhanova, "The Patriotic Turn and Re-Building Russia's Historical Memory: Resisting the West, Leading the Post-Soviet East?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 68, no. 5 (2021): 442–56.

**22** Putin vvel ugolovnuju otvetstvennost' za oskvernenie georgievskoj lenty, RBC, December 29, 2022, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/29/12/2022/63ad91599a794723b65b552f.

**23** Malinova, *Aktual'noye proshloye*, 100–101.

### 1.2 Stalinist Repressions

The repressions and their scale entered public discourse during perestroika, partly due to the founding of the Memorial Society in 1989. While state institutions largely avoided addressing repressions in the 1990s, under Putin's presidency, certain initiatives aimed at confronting this difficult past have received state support. For example, in 2015 the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights (HRC), in collaboration with the Memorial Society, developed a program to commemorate victims of political repressions.[24] This program emphasized ensuring access to archival documents. During this period, Gulag museums became the focus of significant scholarly debate, reflecting broader tensions between memory, state narratives, and civil society.[25] However, many of these initiatives have been increasingly curtailed or co-opted in recent years. Access to archives has become progressively restricted, and activists working on topics related to political repression have faced growing pressure and persecution.[26] The Gulag History Museum itself was closed in December 2024 and is currently undergoing reorganization under the authority of the Museum of Moscow,[27] raising concerns about the future independence and orientation of its exhibitions and research.

### 1.3 USSR

Nostalgia for the Soviet Union has been growing since the early 1990s. During Boris Yeltsin's presidency, state memory politics sought to break with the Soviet past.[28] Under Putin, however, the image of the USSR has been increasingly presented in a positive light. The USSR is often depicted through its victories and achievements, such as the triumph in the Great Patriotic War, ethnic equality, space exploration, and industrial accomplishments.[29] Grassroots initiatives focused on childhood, culture, and materiality have also been co-opted by the state, reinforcing a non-confrontational image of the USSR.[30]

### 1.4 1990s

The 1990s are becoming increasingly prominent in Russia's memory politics. This period has become part of the nostalgia market, alongside the late Soviet era, amplified by new media.[31] However, the "turbulent 1990s," often depicted in official discourse as a time of chaos and disorder, serves as a contrast to the stability attributed to Putin's leadership.[32]

## 2 Institutions

A key feature of the role of the past and memory in Russian public discourse from the 2000s to the 2020s has been the establishment of an "institutional environment" supporting the official memory politics.[33] This process defined the "rules of the game" for other public history agents and practices, marked by increasing administrative and financial state control. A pivotal mechanism was the introduction of foreign agent laws (starting in 2012), which progressively restricted and ultimately nearly eliminated NGO access to foreign funding. As a result, the state grant system became the dominant funding source for public history projects in the early 2010s. State structures played a central role in the "institutionalization" process during this period, with one prominent example being the Commission under the

**24** "Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoy politiki po uvekovecheniyu pamyati zhertv politicheskikh repressiy," August 15, 2015, http://www.president-sovet.ru/docs/normative_initiatives/kontseptsiya_gosudarstvennoy_politiki_po_uvekovecheniyu_pamyati_zhertv_politicheskikh_repressiy/.

**25** Daria Khlevnyuk, "Victim-heroes in collective memory: Surviving soviet repressions heroically," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 2 (2023): 319–32.

**26** "Delo Yuriya Dmitriyeva. Khronologiya 2016–2021," November 29, 2016, https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/delo-yuriya-dmitrieva-hronologiya-20162020-gg/.

**27** Kristina Safonova and Svetlana Reyter, "Reshili intelligentno likvidirovat'," *Meduza*, January 15, 2025, https://meduza.io/feature/2025/01/15/reshili-intelligentno-likvidirovat.

**28** Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

**29** Charles J. Sullivan, *Motherland Soviet Nostalgia in the Russian Federation* (Lexington: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 13–14.

**30** *Post-Soviet Nostalgia: Confronting the Empire's Legacies*, eds. Otto Boele et al. (London: Routledge, 2019).

**31** Mykola Makhortykh, "We Were Hungry, but We Were Also Free: Narratives of Russia's First Post-Soviet Decade on Instagram," in *Remembering Transitions*, ed. Ksenia Robbe (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 205–32.

**32** Olga Malinova, "Framing the Collective Memory of the 1990s as a Legitimation Tool for Putin's Regime," *Problems of Post-Communism* 68, no. 5 (2021): 429–41; Andrei Zavadski, "Remembering the 1990s in Russia as a Form of Political Protest: Mnemonic Counterpublics," in *Remembering Transitions,* 183–204.

**33** Aleksej Miller, "Vvedenie. Bol'shie peremeny. Chto novogo v politike pamjati i v ee izuchenii?", in *Politika pamyati v sovremennoy Rossii i stranakh Vostochnoy Evropy. Aktory, instituty, narrativy*, eds. Aleksej Miller and Dmitrij Efremenko (St. Petersburg: Publishing House of the European University at St. Petersburg, 2020), 8–25.

President of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests (2009–2012).[34] Composed of influential historians and officials, the creation of this commission provoked significant resistance within the academic community.

By the 2010s, state historical politics increasingly relied on public organizations and social projects, including two prominent historical societies: the Russian Historical Society (RHS, established in June 2012)[35] and the Russian Military Historical Society (RMHS, established in December 2012).[36] Both are officially designated as public organizations.[37] The RMHS has a broader reach, with 28,572 members and 894 regional branches as of late 2024.[38] In contrast, the RHS has a more specialized membership base comprising historians, journalists, and officials, totaling approximately 550 members as of 2021.[39] These organizations are predominantly governed by state institutions, with leadership positions held by prominent political figures. The RMHS is headed by former Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky, while the RHS is led by Sergey Naryshkin, Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service and former chair of the Commission Against Falsification of History.

Both entities play a significant role in "curating" and overseeing institutions, communities, and audiences engaged with the past. The RHS focuses on professional historians and fosters collaboration among universities, research institutes, museums, archives, and libraries. In contrast, the RMHS engages with national patriotic organizations, regional veterans' groups, and major military re-enactment communities. This "curatorship" frequently includes administrative enforcement (evident in certain universities), ensuring control over narratives, the prioritization of specific topics, and the swift appropriation of grassroots initiatives. Framing their mission as educational, both societies organize exhibitions, public lectures, and discussions. The RHS publishes and digitizes historical sources, emphasizing the political and military history of 20th-century Russia.[40] The RMHS supports large-scale public initiatives, the most prominent being the *Russia–My History* multimedia historical parks.[41] Currently, 26 branches operate across Russia and occupied regions of Ukraine, such as Lugansk and Melitopol.

The work of the RHS and RMHS illustrates the logic of CPH. Their activities borrow tools originally designed to democratize historical knowledge – public lectures, digitization, mass exhibitions, interactive technologies – but place them in the service of a state-centered, "conservative," narrative. The content they promote centers on rulers, military leaders, and heroic victories, offering a univocal, non-conflictual, and "patriotic" version of history. It is important to note that CPH seeks to extend its reach into Russia's regions, simultaneously exercising control and reinforcing the centralization of historical work at the regional level.[42]

At the heart of CPH lies the claim to authoritative expertise. Both societies stress the "objective" study of history, while accusing critics of politicization. For example, RMHS publications have attacked the Free Historical Society[43] which had been founded in 2014 by liberal historians to resist state-driven "patriotic" history and was dissolved in 2023, as a biased actor funded by Western foundations. Such rhetoric reproduces the logic of the foreign agent laws, which delegitimize independent voices while reserving the right to "objectivity" for state-approved experts. In this sense, CPH represents not simply a "conservative content" in history, but a "conservative reconfiguration" of the very form of public history practices. By relying on the tools of public history while stripping them of their democratic function, CPH both reflects and reproduces the broader authoritarian tendencies of Russian political culture.

## 3 Education

Education serves as the primary platform for the centralization of history, reinforced by administrative measures[44] such as the standardization of the Unified State Exam (USE)

**34** In 2020, a structure with a similar name was recreated in the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.

**35** "Rossijskoe istoricheskoe obshhestvo," https://historyrussia.org.

**36** "Rossijskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshhestvo," https://rvio.histrf.ru.

**37** The RMHS is a "voluntary self-governing public-state association" and the RHS is a "scientific public organization."

**38** "Rossijskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshhestvo–RVIO," VK, December 29, 2024, https://vk.com/wall-69976433_36045.

**39** "Obnovljonnyj Reestr chlenov RIO," Rossijskoe istoricheskoe obshhestvo, July 23, 2021, https://historyrussia.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&layout=edit&id=5984.

**40** A digital library of historical documents: "Elektronnaja biblioteka istoricheskih dokumentov," https://docs.historyrussia.org/.

**41** Ekaterina Klimenko, "Politically Useful Tragedies: The Soviet Atrocities in the Historical Park(s) 'Russia – My History,'" *Problems of Post-Communism* 70 (2021): 1–13.

**42** Konstantin Pakhalyuk, *V poiskah russkoj drevnosti: "konservativnyj povorot" i politika pamjati v regionah Central'noj Rossii (2010-e – nachalo 2022 goda)* (Moscow: New Literary Observer, 2025).

**43** "O Vol'nom istoricheskom obshhestve. Mify i real'nost,'" IstorijaRF, 2017, https://histrf.ru/read/articles/o-volnom-istoricheskom-obshestve-mify-i-realnost/.

**44** Valentina Feklyunina et al., "Militarization of History and Mnemonic Habits in Putin's Russia: Pedagogy of War," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 41, no. 3 (2025): 181–98.

in history – a requirement for university admissions – and the introduction of mandatory Russian history courses in higher education in 2023. Projects like *Russia–My History* and other conservative initiatives are explicitly designed to help students prepare for the USE. A key example of this approach is the Unified Textbook project, launched in 2013 by the RHS and the RMHS. On August 7, 2023, Vladimir Medinsky unveiled a new state textbook on world and Russian history for grades 10–11, further advancing this standardized narrative.[45]

Within the framework of CPH in Russia, public history is frequently framed as a "pedagogical discipline," essentially, an uncritical transmission of historical knowledge reduced to the memorization of "dates and names." This model emphasizes accessibility and consumption over critical thinking, reflecting the broader logic of CPH, where history is mobilized to reinforce authority, patriotism, and social cohesion rather than to foster analytical debate. Modern tools, including digital media, gamification, popular culture references, and internet memes, are often employed to engage younger audiences, demonstrating the instrumentalization of popular history for ideological purposes.[46]

Involving children with CPH practices is increasingly integrated into openly propagandistic and militarized projects. A notable example is the All-Russian network of military-historical camps *Country of Heroes*,[47] organized by the RMHS since 2022 (with four camps operating in 2025). In the camps, schoolchildren are offered training in four thematic areas, which, along with "Defenders" (military training), "Victory Media" (creation of patriotic media projects), and "Victory Volunteers" (organization of mass patriotic events), include "Keepers of History." The latter area positions children as custodians of the past by tasking them with constructing a model obelisk dedicated to military heroes and curating an exhibition on episodes of Russia's military history. The materials for these exhibitions are drawn from objects and documents collected by participants during camp activities.

At the same time, educational programs in public history have undergone significant transformations. For instance, the Moscow program was closed in 2025,[48] while many regional initiatives continue to operate, albeit only partially preserving the original vision of liberal public history. Concurrently, new centers adopting the label of public history – but firmly aligned with state priorities – have emerged. A striking example is the Centre for Public History, established in 2022 at Moscow City Pedagogical University. Its stated objectives – expressed in bureaucratic language – include "forming an objective and engaging public and media perception of current issues in Russian and world history."[49] The Centre's work focuses on two applied areas: developing and implementing educational and methodological materials for current historical topics and the USE, and creating projects to popularize humanitarian knowledge in Russian and world history. Notably, unlike other initiatives aligned with state memory politics, these programs do not explicitly foreground the language of combating "falsifications of history" or defending against Western ideological influence. Nevertheless, they remain firmly embedded within the logic of CPH, as they prioritize a standardized, non-conflictual, and state-centered understanding of history, shaping public historical consciousness while limiting space for critical reflection.

## 4 Media and Bloggers

Television remains a prominent tool for shaping the Russian historical narrative. In the early 2000s, Russian television experienced a boom in historical programs, primarily created by journalists, often in consultation with professional historians. However, in the 2010s, historical discussions have largely shifted into the format of political talk shows. At the same time, a segment of specialized historical media and television channels has emerged, focusing primarily on the aforementioned themes.[50] A notable example is the "Nostalgia" channel, focused on the Soviet past, which was founded in 2004.[51] In 2018, the Information Agency

**45** The contradictions of the "pro-state but multinational" model of Russian history are exemplified by the sharp criticism of the justification of the deportation of Chechens in 1944: "Controversial New Russian History Textbook Opens Old Wounds In North Caucasus," *RadioFreeEurope*, September 29, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-history-textbook-opens-old-wounds-north-caucasus/32615848.html.

**46** E.g.: Ekaterina Karmanova, "Public History: riski i vozmozhnosti," Uchitel'skij zhurnal, May 22, 2023, https://www.teacherjournal.ru/categories/20/articles/2501.

**47** "Strana gerojev," https://странагероев.рф.

**48** For a discussion of the internal and external reasons for the failure of these projects, see: Andrei Zavadski et al., "Public History in Russia: The Past, the Present, and (Thoughts About) the Future," *International Public History* 5, no. 2 (2022): 143–56.

**49** "Centr publichnoj istorii podvel itogi pervogo istoricheskogo krossvorda-onlajn", MGPU, November 25, 2024, https://www.mgpu.ru/onlajn-krossvord-pamyatniki-i-pamyatnye-mesta-rossii/.

**50** Racheva, Stepanov, "Zhurnalistika," 103.

**51** "Nostal'gija," http://nostalgiatv.ru.

"Pobeda RF" was established as a project of the Victory Museum Strategic Initiatives Fund.[52]

New media has become a significant tool for CPH, providing platforms for the rise of bloggers and history "experts," who are usually not professional historians but rather journalists or reenactors. These bloggers usually focus on military and Soviet history. Many of them adopt a pro-government stance and receive support from state organizations such as the RMHS. Klim Zhukov, for example, has become one of the most popular historical bloggers and reenactors in recent years, with over 900,000 subscribers on YouTube.[53] He is frequently invited to RMHS events as an expert. In some cases, such blogs evolve into business projects and position themselves as educational platforms. One such project is "Digital History,"[54] created by journalist and entrepreneur Yegor Yakovlev, who has twice received the prize, established by the pro-state Society "Znanie" (Knowledge).[55]

Bloggers often establish their image as history experts by criticizing liberal authors and avoiding audience engagement, instead presenting a clear and uniform narrative of the past. Their discussions usually feature like-minded experts, often historians with limited academic recognition. Audience engagement is based on reinforcing the pedagogical and top-down logic characteristics of CPH. A notable example is the backlash against journalist Yuri Dud's 2019 film "Kolyma – The Birthplace of Our Fear,"[56] which focuses on Stalin's repressions and the Gulag's legacy in Kolyma.[57] The film drew significant criticism from conservative, pro-state bloggers.

To sum up, while some of these elements reflect global trends and others are specific to the Russian context, together they constitute a complex set of processes that resist simple categorization. Interpreting them through the framework of conservative public history enables a fuller understanding, not only of their roles and significance, but also of their practices and internal diversity. This perspective underscores the intersections between pro-Putin historical politics and populist appropriations of the past in Europe and the United States, while at the same time situating these developments within the wider dynamics of contemporary public history.

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